

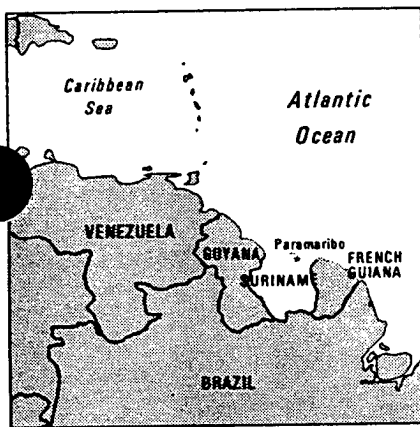
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Suriname



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

June 1982



Official Name:
Republic of Suriname

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun*—Surinamer(s). *Adjective*—Surinamese. **Population** (1980): 352,041. **Annual growth rate** (1972–80): –7.3%. **Ethnic groups:** Creole 31%, Hindustani (East Indian) 37%, Javanese 15.3%, Bush Negro 2.6%, Amerindians, Chinese. **Religions:** Muslim, Hindu, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Moravian, Jewish. **Languages:** Dutch (official), English, Sranang Tongo (lingua franca). **Education:** *Compulsory*—ages 6–12. **Literacy**—80%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—30/1,000. **Life expectancy**—66 yrs. **Work force** (110,000): **Agriculture**—29%. **Industry and commerce**—15%. **Government**—40%.

Geography

Area: 163,265 sq. km. (63,037 sq. mi.); slightly larger than Georgia. **Cities:** *Capital*—Paramaribo (pop. 150,000). *Other cities*—Nieuw Nickerie, Paranam, Moengo. **Terrain:** Varies from savanna to hills. **Climate:** Tropical.

Government

Type: Military-civilian executive. **Constitution:** Suspended. **Independence:** November 25, 1975.

Branches: *Executive*—military-civilian Policy Center rules by decree. *Legislative*—suspended. *Judicial*—Court of Justice with no power to review government decrees.

Administrative subdivisions: 9 districts.

Political parties: Banned. No elections scheduled. **Suffrage:** None.

Central government expenditures (1981 est.): \$413 million.

Flag: Green, white, red, white, green horizontal stripes with yellow star in the middle of the red bar.

Economy

GNP (1981 est.): \$924 million. **Annual nominal growth rate** (1981 est.): 7.9%. **Per capita income:** \$2,600. **Avg. inflation rate last 3 yrs.:** 7.2%.

Natural resources: Bauxite, iron ore, and other minerals; forests; hydroelectric potential; fish and shrimp.

Agriculture: *Products*—Rice, sugar cane, bananas, beans, citrus fruits. *Arable land*—2 million hectares. *Cultivated land*—80,000 hectares.

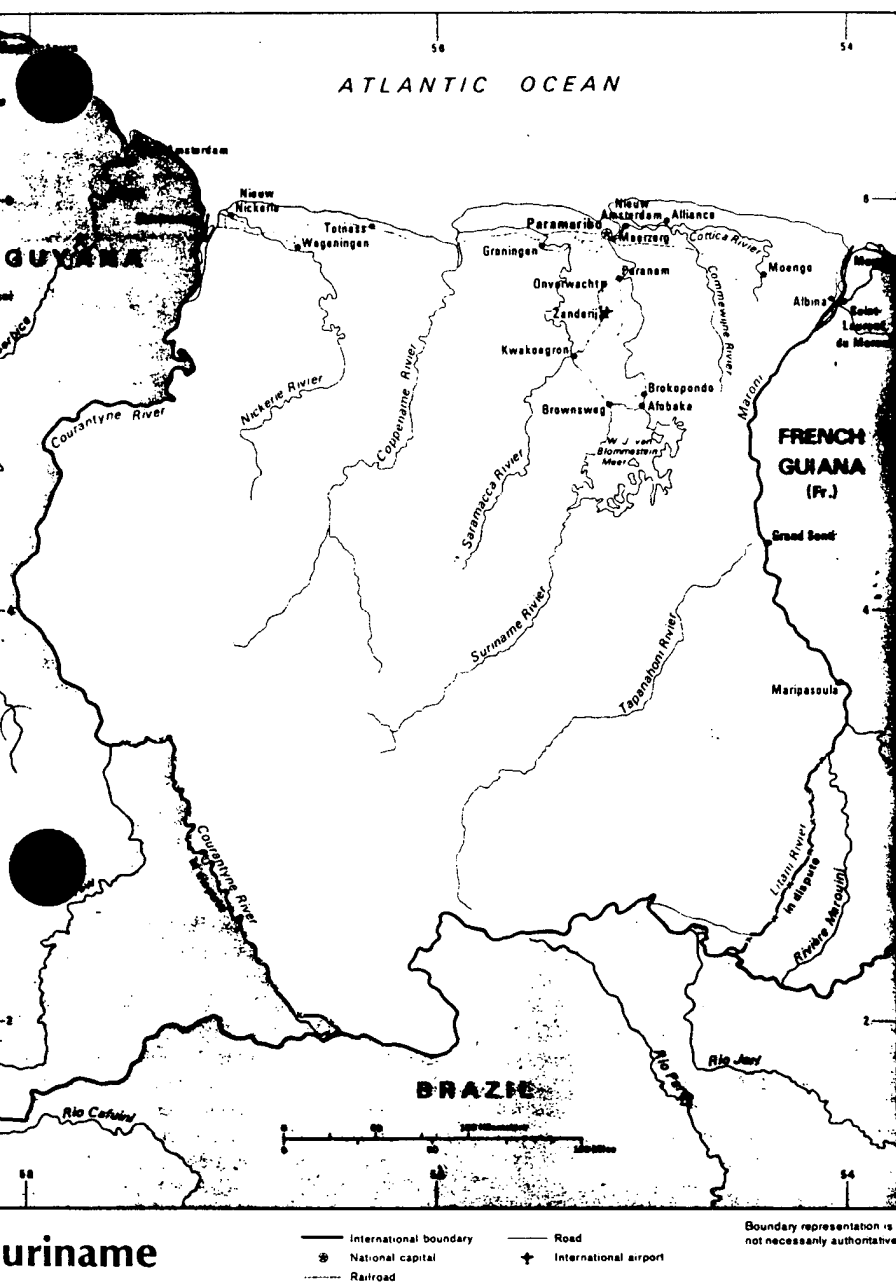
Industries: Aluminum, alumina, processed food, lumber, bricks, cigarettes.

Trade (1980): *Exports*—\$514 million: bauxite, alumina, aluminum, wood and wood products, rice, sugar. *Major markets*—US, Netherlands, EC, and other European countries. *Imports*—\$504 million: capital equipment, petroleum, iron and steel products, agricultural products. *Major suppliers*—US, Netherlands, EC, Caribbean countries.

Official exchange rate (Jan. 1982): 1 Suriname guilder (S.F1) = US\$0.56.

Fiscal year: Calendar year.

Membership in international organizations: UN and affiliated agencies (WHO, ILO, FAO, UNESCO, UNCTAD, World Bank, IMF); Organization of American States (OAS); Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA); International Bauxite Association; associated with EC through Lomé Convention; Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); International Finance Corporation (IFC).



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PEOPLE

Most Surinamers reside in the narrow, northern coastal plain. The population is one of the most ethnically varied in the world, but Surinamers live together peacefully, each ethnic group preserving much of its own culture. Before the February 25, 1980 coup, political parties were based mainly along ethnic lines. A stated goal of the military leaders is to diminish the importance of ethnic identity and to foster the growth of a new national unity. For this reason, current statistics on ethnic groups are not available.

According to prior data, however, the major ethnic groups are Hindustani (37%), Creole (31%), Javanese (15.3%), Bush Negro (2.6%), Amerindians, Chinese, and Europeans. The Creoles and Bush Negroes are descendants of African slaves. The Hindustanis, Javanese, and Chinese are descendants of contract agricultural laborers brought to Suriname between 1870 and 1930. The Amerindians were originally from the Arawak and Carib tribes.

GEOGRAPHY

Located on the north-central coast of South America, Suriname is bordered by Guyana, French Guiana, and Brazil. The country can be divided into three zones:

- The northernmost zone is at sea level, where diking is necessary to save the land. The country's agriculture is concentrated in this area at the mouths of the Suriname, Saramacca, Coppename, and Nickerie Rivers.
- The central zone, a belt about 48-64 kilometers (30-40 mi.) deep, is forested and broken intermittently by scattered savannas. The government's agricultural experiments there have met with limited success because the soil is primarily of quartz and loam.
- The southern zone is hilly, rising gradually to an elevation of about 1,255 meters (4,120 ft.) above sea level in the Wilhelmina Mountains. This area makes up about 75% of the country, but little is known about it because the thick jungle terrain makes transportation difficult.

Suriname's climate is tropical, with an average annual rainfall at Paramaribo of 320 centimeters (90 in.). Temperatures are high throughout the year—21°C-32°C (70°F-90°F)—with little seasonal change except for short dry seasons between the two periods of heavy rainfall. Suriname lies outside the hurricane zone, escaping serious wind damage.

HISTORY

Christopher Columbus sighted the coast of the area formerly known as Guiana in 1498, but the area was unattractive to later Spanish and Portuguese explorers because of the lack of gold. The first successful settlement was established in 1651 by British Lord Willoughby. He welcomed people from unsuccessful West Indian and other South American colonies who brought capital and skills to the new settlement. Notable among these were Jews from Brazil, who, in 1665, erected the first synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. The colony prospered on a plantation economy—cocoa, coffee, sugar, and cotton—based on slave labor from Africa.

By terms of the Treaty of Breda (1667), the Netherlands acquired Suriname from Great Britain in exchange for Dutch rights in Nieuw Amsterdam (Manhattan, New York). The 18th and early 19th centuries saw Suriname in economic and political turmoil stemming from Indian and slave

risings and Dutch preoccupation with East Indian territories. Also during this period, as a result of wars and treaties, sovereignty of the country was transferred among England, France, and the Netherlands. The Netherlands finally regained control of Suriname under the Vienna treaty in 1815. When slavery was abolished in 1863, Suriname, facing a labor shortage, brought contract workers from China, India, and Java.

In 1952, an amendment to the Dutch constitution stipulated that relations between the Netherlands Antilles should be laid down in a charter and should be recognized as constitutional law. With the signing of the charter on December 15, 1954, the reconstruction of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was completed, making Suriname an autonomous part of the Kingdom and granting it equality with the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles. This relationship continued until Suriname's independence on November 25, 1975.

The newly independent nation functioned as a parliamentary democracy until February 25, 1980, when a military coup overthrew the government. New ministers were named by the military and were granted permission by the Parliament to rule by decree. On August 13, 1980, the Parliament was dissolved and the constitution suspended. A six-member Policy Center—three civilians and three military—was established to rule the country by decree. The military appointed a civilian president who also headed the Policy Center. In February 1982, the military forced the president's resignation. A new government was appointed in March 1982 with a civilian prime minister. The supreme executive body remained the Policy Center, this time headed by Army Commander Lt. Col. Desire Bouterse.

GOVERNMENT

Suriname is governed by a Policy Center, headed by the army commander, with civilian members. The Policy Center rules by decree. Its directives are implemented by 12 ministries, with ministers appointed by military leaders. The Council of Ministers, headed by a prime minister, is responsible for developing proposals for consideration by the Policy Center. The prime minister is also a member of the Policy Center. The role of the country's president is ceremonial.

Broadcast media are government controlled. Newspapers are privately owned.

The highest judicial body is the Court of Justice, the members of which

are appointed for life by the president. A special "Corruption Court" also has been established to deal with all cases of corruption under the previous government. It will be disbanded when all such matters are concluded to the satisfaction of the government.

Suriname is divided into nine districts, each administered by a government-appointed commissioner.

Principal Government Officials

President—Mr. L.F. Ramdat-Misier
Policy Center Members—Army Commander Lt. Col. Desire Bouterse, Chairman; Garrison Commander Maj. Roy Horb, Vice Chairman; Prime Minister Henri Neijhorst; Foreign Minister Harvey Naarendorp

Secretary of the Policy Center—Ramon Cruden

Council of Ministers

Prime Minister; General Affairs; Finance—Henri Neijhorst
Foreign Affairs—Harvey Naarendorp
Natural Resources, Energy, and Development—Erik Tjon Kie Sim
Transportation, Trade, and Industry—Imro Fong Poen
Education and Science—Harold Rusland
Public Works, Telecommunications, and Construction—Mohamed Attaoellah
Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Fisheries—Jan Sariman
Labor and Social Affairs—Glenn Sankatsingh
Internal Affairs and Justice—Frank Leeftang
Health and Environment—Badrisein Sital
Culture, Youth, Sport, People's Mobilization, and Information—Lt. J. Hardjoprajitno
Army and Police—Capt. Iwan Graanoogst

Ambassador to the United States—Henricus Heidweiller
Ambassador to the United Nations—Inderdew Sewrajsing

Suriname maintains an embassy in the United States at 2600 Virginia Avenue NW., Suite 711, Washington, D.C. 20037 (tel. 338-6980-84).

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Political parties are banned. Although the constitution was suspended on August 13, 1980, the government has appointed a commission to draft a new constitution and has pledged an eventual return to constitutional rule. There have been no elections since the February 25,

READING LIST

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Bruyning, C.F.A. and Lou Lichtveld. *Surinam—A New Nation in South America*. Paramaribo: Radhakishun, 1959.
Mitchell, Sir Harold. *Europe in the Caribbean*. London: Chambers, 1963.
Naipaul, V.S. *The Middle Passage—The Caribbean Revisited*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
Price, Richard, ed. *Maroon Societies*. New York: Anchor Press, 1973.
Van Poll, Willem. *Surinam*. The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1959.

More information can be obtained from the Suriname Tourist Bureau, Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020.

1980 coup, and dates for elections have not been set. The traditional, moderate, Western orientation of the Surinamese Government, which persisted even after the 1980 revolution, shifted significantly in 1981, when the military leadership announced the adoption of Socialist principles. Nevertheless, policies have tended to be pragmatic and nondoctrinaire.

DEFENSE

The Surinamese National Army consists of about 1,500 personnel divided into army, navy/coast guard, and air force components. The ground forces are organized to perform internal security duties and civic action functions. Their mission is to safeguard, protect, and uphold the values of the February 1980 revolution; to protect the country against aggression; to assist with developing an infrastructure; and to augment and assist the local police force during fires, disturbances, and demonstrations.

A newly activated air division is taking delivery of a few Britten-Norman Defender planes. The army is equipped with light infantry weapons and armored cars; the coast guard has three modern ocean-going patrol boats.

The Netherlands no longer has a military mission in Suriname. Instead, a defense attache performs some of the military assistance functions.

ECONOMY

Suriname's bauxite deposits are believed to be among the world's richest. Mining, processing, and exporting bauxite, alumina, and aluminum are the backbone

TRAVEL NOTES

Climate and clothing—Paramaribo and the littoral are hot and humid all year. Lightweight, wash-and-wear clothing is recommended.

Customs—A visa is not required, but a valid passport or proof of US citizenship is. Tourists may be asked to show onward tickets, necessary travel documents, or sufficient funds for their stay.

Health—Medical services are adequate for most purposes. Most essential medicines are available locally. Malaria and other tropical diseases are endemic but occur more frequently outside the capital. Paramaribo's tap-water is potable.

Telecommunications—Domestic and international telephone and telegraph connections are good. Paramaribo is 1½ hours ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation—Overland travel is restricted because there are few roads and bridges, and large parts of the country outside the littoral are accessible only by light plane and canoe. Several flights a week connect Paramaribo with other Caribbean and Latin American centers. There are two weekly flights to Amsterdam. Paramaribo has bus and taxi services.

of the economy. Sites of the two major bauxite deposits—Moengo and Paranam—are accessible to navigable rivers that empty into the Atlantic. The Suriname Aluminum Company (SURALCO), a subsidiary of the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa), and the Royal Dutch Shell-owned Billiton Company produce and export the bauxite ore, primarily to the United States and Canada. Alcoa has built a \$150 million dam for the production of hydroelectric energy at Afobaka (south of Brokopondo), which created a 1,550-square-kilometer (600 sq. mi.) lake, one of the largest artificial lakes in the world.

Suriname is an exporter of its major staple food crop, rice, and also exports products such as shrimp and timber. It produces more than enough bananas, coconuts, and citrus fruits for domestic consumption. Flour, dairy products, meat, and vegetables must be imported.

At independence, Suriname signed an agreement with the Netherlands providing for about \$1.5 billion in development assistance grants and loans over a 10-15-year period. Development assistance in the form of loans and grants is provided also by the European Community (EC) Development Fund. The United Nations furnishes some technical assistance.

The government also has negotiated agreements with the bauxite producers, SURALCO and Billiton, significantly increasing company payments to the state through a bauxite levy. The agreement is up for review in 1982.

Development plans, aside from infrastructural improvements, center on the expansion of bauxite mining and processing, agriculture, and export-oriented and import-substitution industry.

The principal ocean port is Paramaribo. With 4,580 kilometers (2,850 mi.) of waterways throughout the country, transportation is primarily by boat. Roads total about 2,400 kilometers (1,500 mi.), about 480 kilometers (300 mi.) of which are paved. Except for the mining and industrial lines, Suriname has only 80 kilometers (50 mi.) of operating railroads. Paramaribo is regularly served by Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM), Suriname Airways (SLM), Antillian Airlines (ALM), Guyana Airways, and Cruzeiro do Sol.

The Government of Suriname is reviewing its foreign investment policy. Since the February 1980 coup and subsequent changes of government, national policy has emphasized a mixed economy with increasing state participation in industrial and agricultural enterprises. Foreign participation in development of natural resources has been accepted on a contract joint venture basis.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Since independence, Suriname has joined the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Nonaligned Movement. Discussions are being held concerning membership in the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Suriname is associated with the European Community through the Lomé Convention and is a charter member of the International Bauxite Association. Embassies have been established in the Netherlands, the United States, Venezuela, Guyana, Brazil, and in Belgium, where the embassy is also accredited to the European Community. Diplomatic relations are also maintained with many other nations.

The government has sought to develop closer relations with other "revolutionary Socialist states" in the region, such as Cuba, Grenada, and Nicaragua. Cuba maintains a mission in Suriname, and it has been announced that a Soviet Embassy will open soon.

Relations with Western Europe and the United States remain strong, however, and the major source of foreign aid will probably continue to be the Netherlands. Suriname's announced foreign policy is to expand diplomatic ties with all countries, particularly with those in the Nonaligned Movement and the Caribbean region.

Suriname has longstanding but currently dormant border disputes with its eastern and western neighbors, French Guiana and Guyana.

U.S.-SURINAMESE RELATIONS

The United States has had traditionally friendly official and commercial relations with Suriname, which have existed since 1790, when a consulate was opened in the Dutch colony. The United States is Suriname's largest trading partner, providing 30% of Suriname's imports and taking 41% of its exports. Through each country's embassy, as well as in international fora, the United States and Suriname carry out a regular dialogue on bilateral and multilateral issues.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador Designate—Robert W. Duemling
 Charge d'Affaires—Richard LaRoche
 Chief, Economic Section—Jack P. Gatewood
 Chief, Commercial and Consular Sections—Cornelius M. Keur
 Chief, Political Section—Arnold H. Campbell
 Chief, Administrative Section—Martha L. Campbell
 Public Information Officer—Edward Donovan

The U.S. Embassy in Suriname is located at Dr. Sophie Redmondstraat 129, P.O. Box 1821 (tel. 72900, 76507). ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs • Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • June 1982
 Editor: Joanne Reppert Reams

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